

## **CHAPTER – II**

### **QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN**

#### ***THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO***

***FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN*** (stories-1 to 11)

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### QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN *THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN* (stories-1 to 11)

*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), is a breakthrough short story collection by Sherman Joseph Alexie Jr. It is a collection of twenty-two loosely interconnected stories in the series. This book, titled after one of the stories from the collection, is set on the Spokane Indian Reservation, in eastern Washington State, United States of America. “. . . [this collection] is now in its 1,220,342nd, printing, and it was the basis for a cool movie called *Smoke Signals*”. (Alexie, xvii)

*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* has novel-like features. In his stories, Alexie rarely pays attention towards the development of the plot. The plot and characters from one story frequently appear in different stories. These stories are very wild in style, with thin plots, sketchy characterization, ‘artless’ language, and are narrated by different narrators. The length of the stories is from three pages to about twenty pages. In conventional stories, events are told chronologically but the stories of Alexie grapple with the conflicting representations. Instead of using conventional narrative style Alexie’s prose comes close to poetry and vice versa. It mixes surreal imagery, symbolism, metaphoric language, dream sequences, flashbacks, diary entries etc. These various aspects of Native American literature depict the struggles of Native Americans while trying to survive in a hostile world.

In this book, there are certain recurring characters. Such as Victor Joseph, who often appears as the narrator, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, a storyteller to whom no one listens, Junior Polatkin, who attends college off the reservation, Jimmy Many Horses, who is dying of cancer, Norma

Many Horses, who is respected in the tribe, Adrian etc. are the major characters of this collection. Among them, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire are the central characters. There are number of Native and white minor characters. Historical characters like Qualchan, Wild Coyote, Crazy Horse, Jimi Hendrix Robert Johnson, Wavoka etc. appear throughout the collection. Alexie has incorporated various facets of these reservation bound characters. The same characters also appear in *Reservation Blues* (1995), the first novel by Alexie.

All these characters' whole lives have to do with survival. They refer themselves as Indian. In the modern world, they struggle with the despair of everyday life. They struggle for their personal as well as tribal identity against the problems like racism, alcoholism, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, isolation, divorce, abuse, etc. The stories describe their desires, relationships, and histories with family and other members. The stories suggest some ways to solve these problems. They hope for reconciliation. Sometimes they go beyond the limits of the reservation life. They fight with their proud past and the current challenges before them. They search a sense of self-identity, not only within their indigenous culture but also within the Euro-American culture. There is an eternal quest for self-understanding.

About this collection Bernard Mergen says,

[It] is a comic, sad, poetic, and revealing glimpse of contemporary American Indian life. Clearly influenced by popular culture, Alexie, and the characters he writes about, live in a timeless America populated by Jimi Hendrix and Robert Johnson, Crazy Horse and Wavoka, HUD and the BIA, 7-11 stores and Alcoholics Anonymous. Alexie's characters— Victor, Junior Polatkin, and Thomas Builds-

the- Fire, experience the violence, poverty, and absurdity of life on and off the reservation. (qtd. in Peters 54)

*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* can be considered bildungsroman or coming-of-age story which has two teenage protagonists, Victor and Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Psychological and physiological changes and various stages of developments occur in the life of these adolescent characters. During these phases, they try to find out the answer to the question 'Who am I'. Their central question still about existence is, 'how do we live?' The narrator of *Witnesses, Secret and Not*, a story from this collection, tries ". . . to find out what it meant to be Indian, and there ain't no self-help manuals for that". (211) Through this book, Alexie draws attention towards the results of colonization on young adults and Native American world.

Different stages of the life of Victor, one of the two protagonists, are presented throughout the stories. Most of the book is told from Victor's point of view or perspectives. Victor narrates memories of his life from childhood to his present stage, as a young man. In the first story *Every Little Hurricane* Victor, a child of nine years old, is in his teens. Whereas in the fifth story *The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore*, he in his mid or late-twenties, watches the new generation, ". . . a former basketball star fallen out of shape". (44)

Victor is an alter-ego of Alexie, who has written stories from his late-twenties to early-thirties. Alexie has written this collection with the help of his experience while growing up among his tribe on the Spokane Indian reservation. About the stories from this collection he says:

. . . these stories . . . are the vision of one individual looking at the lives of his family and his entire tribe . . . in trying to

make them true and real, I am writing what might be called reservation realism . . . (xxi) [and] This book is a thinly disguised memoir. (xix)

The title of the collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is derived from a famous radio and television show of 1950s. In it a white man, *The Lone Ranger* and Indian *Tonto* fight together against the evils in the old west. Both the names are symbols of white and Native American identity respectively. Alexie claims that, the title has come to him in a dream. Though, in popular culture, images of the white and the Indian are represented as living in harmony, in reality there are differences between the relationships of two races. When Tonto had a unique partnership with Lone Ranger, he was not equal. But a little less than so called 'civilized' man who was a leader, more capable, individual and superior to Indian Tonto.

As the title of the collection, the titles of the stories are also dreamlike. The play and parody is evident in the title. According to James Cox, title displays deliberate subversion. He says, "Tonto, the traditionally subservient Indian refuses to play the role set for him. In this way, he challenges the Lone Ranger, the iconographic Western hero and the representative of the dominant culture". (56) Tonto represents all the characters. Cox further claims,

Alexie's characters are engaged in the same metaphorical fistfight as the titular Tonto: they struggle for self-definition and self-representation against the oppressive technological narratives that define Native Americans as a conquered people, as decontextualized, romanticized, subservient Tontos, and Native America as a conquered landscape. (56)

Sherman Alexie has given two epigraphs at the beginning of this collection, are very apt and felicitous to the theme of this entire book. These are:

There's a little bit of magic in everything / And then some loss to even things out. –Lou Reed

and / I listen to the gunfire we cannot hear, and begin / this journey with the light of knowing / the root of my own furious love. -Joy Harjo (ix)

The opening story *Every Little Hurricane* sets the tone of the collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. It introduces themes such as poverty, alcoholism, unemployment, pain, dreams, hopes of survival, real and imaginary world, and idea of memory as social and individual identity. Such themes are developed throughout the book to free from white domination and exploitation.

In this first story, a New Year's Eve party is seen through the eyes of nine-year-old Victor who surveys the bizarre behavior of the Indians. In this painful story all Indians are drunk who suffer, damage, broke and hurt each other. They remember their pain, which grows and later expands. Drunk and angry they recall some wrong that had been done to them. Emotional storms and the confusion at the tumultuous party are presented metaphorically through the images of bad weather.

The hurricane represents Victor's emotional unrest and his dilemma about what to do with his past painful memories. He wants to forget them altogether. These describe a childhood of poverty and humiliation. Indian life is colored by the hurricane of injustice, “. . . giving each a specific, painful memory” of it. (8) It began with the winter season when the magical hurricane “. . . dropped from the sky in 1976

and fell so hard on the Spokane Indian Reservation that it knocked Victor from bed and his latest nightmare”. (1)

Upstairs, his parents are hosting the largest New Year’s Eve party in the history of the tribe. At that time wind increases and trees begin falling. In that violent storm abruptly two Indians, Victor’s drunken uncles, Adolph and Arnold start fighting violently for no reason. Victor “. . . could see his uncles slugging each other with such force that they had to be in love. Strangers would never want to hurt each other that badly”. (2) In the feeling of violent anger they start yelling, abusing, cursing and hitting hard each other with force. Victor, “. . . watching his uncles grow bloody and tired . . . pulled the strings of his pajama bottoms tighter [and] squeezed his hands into fists . . .”. (3)

Intimate relatives such as brothers are biting each other to death, is a result of the anger of hundreds of years of colonization. Once, living in a community, sharing sorrows and happiness and solving each other’s problems was identity of Indian people. Victor protests against the present reality and wants to bring back this lost identity. He observes that nobody from the party moves to change the situation, because,

They were all witnesses and nothing more. For hundreds of years, Indians were witnesses to crimes of an epic scale . . . One Indian killing another did not create a special kind of storm. This kind of hurricane was generic. It didn’t even deserve a name. (3)

Here Native people, unable to act, only watch their tragic fates as bystanders. They are witnesses of the hundreds of years of bloodsheds and massacre by white imperialists. Hurricane is a metaphor for the treatment, given to Natives by outsiders in their homeland. And no one

pays attention towards this condition of Indian people. The hurricane on the reservation is shown in, “Unemployment and poverty. Commodity food . . .”. (5)

Meanwhile, Victor’s uncles make a lot of damages and break their nose and ankles. While they are fighting, Victor smells the sweat, whisky and blood, the reason behind the battle. At this time, imagination and hope come to help to save him from permanent damage. They help to bring back past identity of Indians when they were merrily living in their own world. Victor wants to forget such reservation hurricanes. Victor experiences the effects of hurricane on himself as,

Memories not destroyed, but forever changed and damaged .  
 . . [he] wanted to know if memories of his personal  
 hurricanes would be better if he could change them. Or he  
 just forgot about all of it. (4)

Alexie through this story tells that drinking is a common occurrence which has caused much of sadness on the reservation. Fights, sexual encounters, abandonments, and other rash behavior are the results of it. Indians accept it as a fact of reservation life. In this story weather is a metaphor of alcohol, a powerful one. It represents how Indians are treated terribly and are left to face such terrible conditions.

Then Victor goes in the flashback and remembers one Christmas Eve of four years ago. Opening his empty wallet again and again to check money, his father weeps in despair for not having any money for gifts. The emptiness of the wallet symbolizes the poverty which never disappears from the reservation lives. Though Indians are living in the America i.e. economical hub of the modern world where income rate reach to the highest of point, Indians an indigenous people of this very land are kept at lowest income rate. In the pre-colonial era, they were



celebrating their identity of all fulfilled life. But now their identity has become a ritual of emptiness.

Victor comes to know what it means to be an Indian on the edge of the twenty-first century through this ritual performed by his father:

. . . [Victor] watched as the [father] opened his wallet and shook his head. Empty . . . put the empty wallet back in his pocket for a moment, then pull it out and open it again. Still empty . . . repeat this ceremony again and again, as if the repetition itself could guarantee change. But it was always empty. (5)

Alexie himself has lived the poverty stricken life, with his entire community. About his living in poor condition Alexie says, "I knew how to live in poverty, having grown up on an American third-world reservation . . .". (xiii) Further he writes that, ". . . [he] was the first Alexie to ever become middle-class and all because [he] wrote stories and poems about being a poor Indian growing up in an alcoholic family on the alcoholic reservation. (xviii) In this story Victor's observation about poverty is:

When children grow up together in poverty, a bond is formed that is stronger than almost anything . . . Adolph and Arnold reminded each other of their childhood, and how they hid crackers in their shared bedroom so they would have something to eat. (8)

This incident focuses on the reality of American Indians' life at present time. It portrays their difficulties for existence in the modern Spokane Indian Reservation. Though the struggle to complete their hunger makes them wish to kill each other, the same helps to develop a stronger bond, the true identity than anything else. Victor watches his

uncles have forgiven each other and enters in the world of bitter nightmares. In one of them his stomach starts aching with hunger and in another one his father takes drink of vodka on an empty stomach. Victor hears the sound of it:

. . . near-poison fell, then hit flesh and blood nerve and vein .  
 . . like lightning tearing an old tree into halves . . . like a wall  
 of water, a reservation tsunami, crashing onto a small beach .  
 . . like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. (6)

Effects of alcoholism on Indian people are tremendous and devastating such as flood of water, lightening and tsunami. Most of the characters from this collection die of alcoholism. Victor remembers an old Indian man who drowns in a mud puddle at the powwow. He just passes out and falls facedown into the water collected in a tire track. It suggests the literal and figurative isolation of Native people not only from the mainstream American society but also from their own community. The old Indian man died of alcohol effects was not picked up by any one. In all the stories emotional complexities of reservation, a community torn apart by alcoholism are illustrated. The alcoholism is the number one killer in Native Americans. It is one of the symbols throughout the story. About Indian life Rey Young Bear writes:

there is something about / trains, drinking, and being  
 an Indian with nothing to lose. (130)

Meanwhile, the uncles of Victor are back into the party, forgiving each other. And Victor in bed dreams of whisky, vodka, and tequila. He was “. . . watching . . . the ceiling lowered with the weight of each Indian’s pain . . .”. (8) Victor, a child of five, “. . . understood what that meant, how it defined nearly everything. Fronts. Highs and lows. Thermals and undercurrents. Tragedy”. (7) There is a parallel between an

actual storm and the fight. Victor's uncles Adolph and Arnold are compared with 'high-pressure' and 'low-pressure' fronts.

For many characters of Alexie, it is a struggle which brings ultimate downfall and end to their life. From past two decades, Alexie is painting the truth behind alcoholism. His writings have opened up a new window of Native American identity. It is a clear picture of the real problems that exist among the most American Indians. Alcohol dependency and abuse, struggles of inter-personal and family relationships, and the sense of loss of connection with tribe are some of the more frequently recurring problems in Alexie's work. He suggests that the alcohol prevention would certainly lessen these problems.

In this final scene Victor, when searching his parents in the party crosses Adolph and feels the smell of, "Alcohol and sweat. Cigarettes and failure". (9) Finally, Victor finds his parents are passed unconsciously in the bedroom:

. . . breathed deep, nearly choking alcoholic snores. They were sweating although the room was cold, and Victor thought the alcohol seeping through their skin might get him drunk, might help him sleep. He kissed his mother's neck, tasted the salt and whisky. He kissed his father's forearm, tasted the cheap beer and smoke. (9)

Victor put his hands on his parent's stomach and finds that,

There was enough hunger in both, enough movement, enough geography and history, enough of everything to destroy the reservation and leave only random debris and broken furniture. (11)

The history of Native people has been of suppression and warfare by European expansion. During this time, they struggled to keep their identity against colonial destruction. Their geography was changed. In the pre-Columbian era they had occupied land, forests and natural resources of entire American continent. But today on their own land they are kept on 'reservation', a small area of land reserved only for natives by outsiders. All the power is snatched from them to sleep them hungry. Though only remnants of those glorious days are left, Victor feels the power of love, family, and survival there. He has confidence that he will bring back their 'own' identity.

At the end of this story, in the worst forecast one woman loses her temper when she accidentally brushes the skin of another. Indians continue to drink, harder and harder. Natural storm with emotional storm brings other memories of poverty, pain, and humiliation. Victor remembers that his father was spit on when they waited for a bus in Spokane, and his mother was sterilized by the Indian Health Service doctor after he was born. Here Victor's childhood memory is linked with crushing pain and failure of Spokane people. It shows the continuous cruelty of whites against the indigenous people in the twenty-first century.

In the morning the hurricane left the sky and, ". . . all the Indians, the eternal survivors, gathered to count their losses". (11) Here Alexie calls Indians as the survivals, on the one hand, who count the losses on the other. For Indians, tragic reservation reality is less disastrous than natural hurricane and tragic victory of white cruelty. In this story, Victor is fictionalized identity of Alexie. Alexie has given real life problems to his characters and he explains why it is necessary to include them. His own life Alexie was closely connected with alcoholism. He was also an

addict of alcohol for six years. He introduces his father as, “. . . randomly employed blue-collar alcoholic”. (xii)

In this whole story, Victor, a protagonist of this story remembers the hardships of his childhood life only because of alcoholism. About the prevalent theme of alcoholism in this book Alexie says:

Everybody in this book is drunk or in love with [it] . . . I am dealing with stereotypical material. But I can only respond with the truth. In my family . . . there are less than a dozen who are currently sober, and only a few who have never drunk. When I write about the destructive effects of alcohol on Indians, I am not writing out of a literary stance or a colonized mind's need to reinforce stereotypes. I am writing autobiography. (xix)

For this realistic depiction of reservation life in Spokane, Washington, Alexie was criticized. He was “. . . (and continue to be) vilified in certain circles for [his] alcohol-soaked stories” (xviii) and the portrayal of ‘alcoholic Indian’ stereotypes in his work. Alexie knows that alcoholism has become an inseparable part and identifying trait among American Indians. He constantly writes about the effects of alcoholism and poverty by placing his characters in the situations where they witness deaths and downfall.

*A Drug Called Tradition* is an allegorical story by Alexie, which highlights that still Native Americans are discriminated. In the story, Thomas Builds-the-Fire hosts second largest party in the history of reservation. He buys all the beer, because he receives just, “. . . a ton of money from the Washington Water Power because they had to pay for the

lease to have ten power poles running across some land that Thomas had inherited”. (13)

Through Industrialization and commercialization settlers have grabbed all the land of natives. Now they are encroaching on the land of the reservation, a very small portion of land. Once it was identified with ‘mother earth’ by all the Natives as it was no one’s private property. But at present Indians have to accept petty benefits in exchange with that they can only buy alcohol to forget about happy past. Victor comments that their ancestors must be laughing about this type of economic development.

In these stories, occasionally money is mentioned. But it does not impact other than the fact that only Thomas could now buy the beer. Victor Joseph has a new drug of a good brand, just enough for himself, Junior, and a couple of Indian Princesses, but if they are full-blood or at least half-Spokane. They hid it under Junior’s warbonnet and escaped from the party through his car named Camaro, towards Benjamin Lake. Victor invites Thomas as, “It’ll [drug] be very fucking Indian. Spiritual shit . . .”. (14)

Spiritual life was a part of native culture and identity. Alcohol helps them to experience this lost spiritual identity. After drinking, the boys experience strange fragments of visions and hallucinations in a stream of consciousness fashion. Through various cultural activities like storytelling, stealing horses, visions and dreams they try to achieve their lost identity. The boys remember the drug-influenced bouts in their wild youth, the poverty and other realities on this isolated geographical region. They are presented through drug induced visions and stories of Thomas. Thomas in the happy mood tells Victor that, “You’ve got braids, you’re stealing horses and riding by moonlight”. (14)

In Thomas' story name of the horse is Flight. Thomas pokes his head ". . . through some hole in the wall into another world. A better world". (14) The visions show another world, filled with ponies and dances ". . . naked around the fire" (16) and buffalos fall from the sky and join them. Junior sees himself dancing a Ghost Dance with his growing large tribe until, "All the white hands are waving good-bye . . . ships fall off the horizon . . . [Indians] are so tall and strong that the sun is nearly jealous . . .". (17)

This event is portrayed positively. In the drug-influenced bouts, boys succeed to achieve their identity. Their aspects of cultural identity like faith on visions, myth or legend of buffalo, ceremony of Ghost Dance help them to achieve it. With the help of it whites are driven off by Indians. The boys have the visions of white people leaving the United States of America to the Native American people.

Though Junior is assured that the drug will make his driving better, yet he loses control of the car under the influence of powerful drug that Victor has to slam on the breaks. Drug, instead of making their life better, brings destruction on their life. After a while, Junior and Victor start chasing each other across the fields that Thomas has to chase them by car. Then Junior starts singing and playing a song for Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse.

The mythic figure of Crazy Horse haunts this story. It is told in the story that Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse was the President of the U.S. and grandfather of the famous Lakota warrior who helped Indians to win the war against the whites. In this song of *Crazy Horse*; finally Indians win the war of four thousand years against gunned white men. Here Junior shares his romantic dreams about the happy past of Indians with his friends to explain the concept of living in the past.

When the boys reach Benjamin Lake, Victor dances around both the friends. Though the drug begins to wear off, still they were with another can of warm Diet Pepsi. In the story of Thomas, who does not need drugs to tell stories, all the Indian boys decide to be real Indians. They want, “. . . to have their vision, to receive their true names, their adult names . . . [because] They have the same names all their lives. Indians wear their names like a pair of bad shoes”. (20)

Here the boys want to come out of the stereotypical images, and false identities created by colonizers to suppress their self-esteem. They want to search their true selves on their own. For this reason, all they are carried to the past before any of them take first drink of alcohol. They throw their beer, whisky and vodka out, given by greedy invaders to forget their real names. They earn their adult Indian names, through visions and the initiation test of stealing horses.

Thomas leaves them when Victor does not believe ‘that shit’, the stories of Thomas. They are the very soul of Indian culture and its identity, which has preserved and transferred thousands of year’s old culture. Before leaving Thomas tells something, which was not acknowledgeable for Junior and Victor. It was near to something like which is supported by Victor’s assertion:

Your past is skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is skeleton walking one step in front of you. May be you don’t wear a watch, but your skeletons do, and they always know what time it is. Now, these are made of memories, dreams, and voices. We are trapped in the now . . . in-between, between touching and becoming. (22)



Thomas wants to tell them that culture has existence of past and future. It is filled by the dreams of forefathers, and one cannot easily escape through this trap of identity under the influence of alcohol, a deadly weapon spread among Indians to wipe their identity. On the other hand drug, the same weapon is a way of linking present with past and also with the future, is suggested through the treatment of time. Drug helps to restore this cultural heritage and identity. It helps to establish a fluid relationship with time. It allows the indigenous people to go back to create a meaningful link with cultural heritage of the past which gives purpose and identity in the present. But then sober, Indians realize that the dreams of the past or the future are not about real life.

Spiritual leaders, who have led and guided the tribes in difficulties, have played a crucial role in protecting the Indian culture. So they are worshipped and believed by tribes. Victor and Junior, after spending night in the experiment of hallucinogenic drugs, are visited by Big Mom, a Spiritual Leader of the Spokane Tribe. A visionary leader she provides 'good medicine' to the Indians. She gives Victor, ". . . a little drum . . . . a hundred years old, maybe older . . . keep that she said. Just in case . . . Just give it a tap and [she'll] be right over . . . (23) Victor does not use the drum after the death of Big Mom. But his belief is expressed in his words as, "But keep it really close to me . . . just in case . . . I guess you could call it the only religion I have . . . if I played it a little, it might fill up the whole world". (23)

This act of giving a little drum, a part of cultural heritage to the young generation is the last thing to preserve their identity. Big Mom conveys Victor, that he has strong relationship with his religion and tradition. The symbol of drum represents the rich Native culture of knowledge, which Victor, with other Indians has lost. Indian youth such

as Victor, separated from the past and crushed under white oppression, validates his manhood with drugs and alcohol. Big Mom put an alternative before Natives to return towards the old ways which have the power to change the world.

*Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock* explores the memories of Victor. These are about his family relationships, his relation with father, his father and mother's love story, his father's relationship with alcohol etc. are described in a series. In this story, Alexie upsets stereotypes humorously. It is set against the background of the Native American people's relationship with modern America.

Victor's father was antiwar demonstrator and protested the Vietnam War during 1960s. He begins,

During the sixties my father was a perfect hippie since all hippies were trying to be Indians. Because of that, how could anyone recognize that my father was trying to make a social statement. (24)

Here Alexie suggests that Indians were purposely excluded from taking part in countercultural movement or mainstream life during 1960s. When Victor's father shows his protest fighting against National Guardsmen, he was sent to jail at Woodstock. His father was arrested and charged with attempted murder. Later it was reduced to assault with a deadly weapon. At that time his photograph was reprinted in the newspaper as an evidence of this incident, throughout the country. Under which there was a caption,

. . . DEMONSTRATER GOES TO WAR FOR PEACE . . .  
capitalized on his father's Native American identity with

other headlines like ONE WARRIER AGAINST WAR AND PEACEFUL GATHERING TURNS INTO NATIVE UPRISING. (25)

Though narrator's father was not warrior, media stereotyped this incident as Indians are warriors. Victor does not go to war because his father had gone to jail. There his father went through another kind of war, between white, black, Indians, and Mexican gangs. In the jail, everyone was used to expect a daily death toll. In jail, Indians have to face a different type of exploitation.

Victor remembers that his father played the tape of Jimi Hendrix, when he came out of prison. His father and Jimi later become drinking buddies. Victor waits for them to come home until long night. He helps them to play 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. His father feels at home when he plays the music by Jimi Hendrix, especially the Star Spangled Banner at Woodstock, a song by Jimi. Victor plays Jimi Hendrix's music to communicate and create a bond with his father, who passes out being drunk. Then as a means of apology, he tells Victor stories in the morning. One night when Victor was driving home with father, they listened on radio, ". . . Jimi's guitar, there seemed to be more to all that music" and there was not need to talk to communication. Victor wanted to learn to play guitar to, ". . . come closer to what Jimi knew, to what [his] father knew". (28)

In this story the music of Jimi Hendrix, a famous guitarist brings Victor close to his father and gives him comfort from sad reservation life. Victor tells that,

The first time [he] heard Robert Johnson sing [he] knew he understood what it meant to be Indian on the edge of the

twenty-first century, even if he was black at the beginning of the twentieth. (35)

In this story, Alexie tries to unite two different worlds of two different people. Victor's father, a native warrior, is an intimate friend of white musician Jimi Hendrix. Here Alexie broadens the horizons of his world to create a new type of identity. In the words of Victor's father:

Yeah, well, that's how it is. You kids today don't know shit about romance . . . about music either. Especially you Indian kids. You all have been spoiled by those drums. Been hearing them beat so long, you think that's all you need. Hell, son, even an Indian needs a piano or guitar or saxophone now and again. (30)

Today's Indian kids' ignorance about music and romance is the result of a short-sighted view of the world. It is a limiting and stagnant world view to create Native identity depending only on the Indian drums. It is a, Victor's father warns against the confidence in only the drums. He asks the new generation to unite modern Euro-American and old Indian ways of life to create more sustainable identity, the need of in the twenty-first century.

Victor expresses sorry for the Indian boys, of his generation for not having real war to fight. But his father feels that Victor is lucky for having only the 'damn desert storms' and anger. He thinks, ". . . why the hell would [Victor] want to fight a war for this country? It's been trying to kill Indians since the very beginning. Indians are pretty much born soldiers anyway. Don't need to prove it". (29) Victor's father wants to save his next generation from extinction from American land. Now it is grabbed by exploiters from various countries of Europe. Victor's father

opposes death in the war, especially for those who have been trying to erase the very existence of indigenous people.

When Victor with his parents visits Jimi's grave, from then his parents' marriage starts breaking. It was "... the only marriage broken up by a dead guitar player [Jimi Hendrix]". (34) Victor's father buys a motorcycle and leaves Victor with the family, only to hear the imaginary sound of motorcycles and guitars. Victor observes that the fall of his parents' marriage was "... more destructive and painful than usual, because now Indians fight to hold onto the last good thing, because their ... whole lives have to do with survival". (32)

Here Alexie tells that it was easy before five hundred years ago, before the arrival of invaders when Natives were living prosperous life in the company of nature. Then men or women were just packing their possessions before leaving the 'tipi'. But now, on the corners of reservation life whites have forced them to learn their greedy ways and crisis in a relationship. The incident of Victor's father's separation from his family presents the power of music, the turbulent nature of reservation relationships, and their struggle to survive. When features of one culture are adopted by another one, it results in the destruction of the adopted culture. Many problems on the reservation are the result of contamination of Indian culture from Euro-American culture. Victor explains that,

On a reservation, Indian men who abandon their children are treated worse than white fathers who do the same thing. It's because white men have been doing that forever and Indian men have just learned now. That's how assimilation can work. (34)

Alexie's portrayals of white characters in this book create fear and dislike against Euro-American culture. Indian family structure has been polluted by the interaction with the white world. It has taught Indian men about how to abandon their children and family. Victor's father has deserted his family. Victor reminisces about the few good memories of his father and misses him most when he listens to music, because Victor always knew that, ". . . he's coming back". (35)

*Crazy Horse Dreams* is a story in which the Native American quest for a cultural identity is a major theme. In it, Victor meets One-Bread, a Blackfoot waitress at the fry bread stand and fails to meet her image of the *Crazy Horse*, an ideal Indian hero. The waitress flirts with him continuously and he does everything he can to avoid her. She finds him again at the Powwow and invites him to her Winnebago, a car to get into bed with him. But Victor, an educated Indian returned from Reservation University, who is not a warrior and has not the hands of a fisherman of her dream, starts shaking. So, ". . . she was still waiting for Crazy Horse". (40)

Alexie criticizes the idealization of Indians in the Native culture as well as Euro-American, a dominant one. *Crazy Horse* is an ideal warrior figure from Indian history who protested and fought against whites at the age of 16. He is a symbol of Native American heroism and masculinity. Here Alexie suggests that such figures are not relevant to present Indian society so there is need of new heroes. It has created stereotypical identity of Indian men, only possible in the world of imagination and dream. In this story, *Crazy Horse Dreams* Victor fails to meet ideal against image of Indian woman's dream.

When that woman asks him what he is afraid of, he talks about mundane things like escalators, elevators, revolving doors and any kind

of forced movement. They discuss about what type of Indian she is. Victor gawks at the fact that she does not have any scars like he does and that she is educated. She does not feel him important before Plains Indian women who “. . . rode their horse eighteen hours a day . . . could shoot seven arrows consequently, have them all in the air at the same time . . . were the best light cavalry in the history of the world”. (39)

Victor feels that she is not a real Indian, so he leaves the Winnebago. Both, the Indian man and woman have lost their real identity. It is the influence of white world psychology. They have failed to meet each other's expectations of identity, which are totally unreal. They try to live up with the model of an ideal Indian. The relationship of Victor and an Indian woman failed because they want the ideal Indian. She was 'waiting for Crazy Horse' whom Victor finds 'just another Indian'.

In this story, an Indian society is caught up between two worlds. In one world, Indians desire the modern America of fancy cars and cable television, though they feel out of home there. In another world, they feel a mixed nostalgia for the Native American heritage and values. This confusion stops the characters in their development and results into double identity. In this story, Victor hesitates to become intimate when time comes.

In *The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore* Victor and Adrian sitting on the porch of HUD (US government's Department of Housing and Urban Development) house discuss the rise and fall of their reservation basketball heroes and the dreams they carried for their tribe mates. They wonder that if Julius Windmaker, who symbolizes the ability and possibility on the reservation, will 'make it'. Julius is “. . . the latest in a long line of

reservation basketball heroes . . .” who “. . . had that gift, that grace, those fingers like a goddamn medicine man”. (45) Tribal police officers take him away for throwing bricks through the car window. Julius becomes an alcoholic from then, the reason behind profound hopelessness on the reservation.

Like Julius Windmaker Victor, narrator of the story is former basketball star. Though his glorious days are disappeared he defends the importance of basketball hero on the reservation because,

In the outside world, a person can be a hero one second and a nobody the next . . . but a reservation hero is remembered. A reservation hero is a hero forever. In fact, their status grows over the years as the stories are told and retold. (48)

Victor and his friend Adrian, refrain from drinking for a while. They remember basketball heroes of past generations. At night while going out they keep the door of their house open, to sleep someone drunk Indian. And in the morning they find that Julius is died after cold and drinking heavy. It shows their sense of community. Earlier they had never blamed Julius for his drinking. While discussing about the basketball talent of Julius Windmaker, Adrian and Victor build myths around gifted individuals to retain hope because it is one of the ways to cultivate meaning on the barren reservation life.

Then the boys drinking diet Pepsi on the porch, “. . . watched the reservation. Nothing happened . . . could see that the only traffic signal on the reservation had stopped working”. (44) The traffic signal on the reservation symbolizes that the reservation life is not on the way of progress or moving ahead with Western world. It is like a water of still pond, unchanged and at the same place from long past. If neglected, it



becomes worse. It symbolizes the inactive and lethargic Indian life which is very close to decay.

They see old basketball high school buddies walk by and heckle with each other. Being a former basketball star, now fallen out of shape Victor feels, “. . . nothing more unattractive than a vain man, and that goes double for an Indian man”. (44) Victor remembers how he was a fantastic basketball player in high school. Victor and Adrian with other Indians pass one year after another sitting on the porch, doing nothing except eating, sleeping and drinking, because they think that,

It's hard to be optimistic on the reservation . . . . Indians can easily survive the big stuff . . . It's the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn't take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins. (49)

It shows that genocidal acts of long past have banished the Indigenous people towards reservations. Drugs help them to forgive emptiness. And keep them away from being optimistic about life. In the past five centuries Indians have faced big problems like loss of language and land rights, mass murder etc. It is resulted into the decrease in their population and loss of their identity. Current racism and classism increase poverty. Laws maintain this oppressive ideology. Though Indians have faced such big problems they cannot face small problems like white waitress does not take an order of Tonto. It is an insulting and dehumanizing depiction of a stereotypical Indian hero.

The story ends with a sarcastic note. Although Indians see basketball heroes as “saviors”, after Julius they have to pin their hope on Lucy. They see savior in Lucy, a little brown girl who is a third-grade basketball player. Though it shows the importance of women in Spokane

Indian tradition it is not possible that any Indian player will change their plight.

In the story *Amusements* Victor remembers a trip to the white carnival with his friend Sadie. They attempt to please white men casting aside their Indian identity. The very first line of this story by Adrian C. Louis is very meaningful. It suggests that endless difficulties are the reality of reservation life. It is, "I lower a frayed rope into the depths and hoist / the same old Indian tears to my eyes. The liquid is pure and / irresistible". (54)

In the middle of a white carnival, Dirty Joe who is always drunk and has many scars from bar fights passes out after summer heat and too much coat-pocket whiskey. Sadie and Victor stand over him and think about his flat face as, ". . . a map for all the wars he fought in the Indian bars", (54) though he is not warrior in the old sense. This incident indicates the old signs of Indian segregation by whites. Indians fight against it from inside the cage. Being Indians Victor and Sadie could not leave Dirty Joe, an Indian because being an Indian surely he would have gone to jail. Onlookers and white tourists gawk, watch, laugh, and point a finger at them as if it is a show. Their faces were twisted with hate and disgust. Meanwhile a crowd of whites gather around them. Victor observes,

Twenty or thirty white faces, open mouths grown large and deafening wide eyes turned toward Sadie and [Victor]. They were jury and judge for the twentieth-century fancydance of these court jesters who would pour Thunderbird wine into the Holy Grail. (56)

Victor fears and wants to hide from such type of the harsh experiences among white world, ". . . [his] Indian teeth, the quick Joke".

(55) He wants to charge them so he can drink Coors Light for a week. Here humor comes to help Victor, the only way to continue their existence in hostile world. Here it becomes clear that Indians are seen as heathen 'jesters' by white community who think them as a threat to their way of life.

After a while, victor agrees with Sadie to leave Dirty Joe on the ground, bribing the carny, a white attendant to put Dirty Joe on the Stallion, a miniature roller coaster. They carry him over the Stallion to ride all the day, though he is drunk 'as a skunk', and looks like ". . . an old blanket [they] gave away". (56) The old blanket symbolizes that the old cover of Indian identity to live in unity and help other fellows in worst time is given up by some members of tribe. They do not want to be identified with drunk and passed out Joe, at whom white people laugh.

When victor and Sadie get away, carny points them as culprit. And one of the Indian boys yells back, "You're dead, Indian". (57) Then Dirty Joe awakens and searches for someone familiar lifting his head. The whole scene turns into funhouse when two security guards secretly start chasing Victor. While fleeing he escapes and sees himself in the crazy mirrors, making him realize that he is ". . . the Indian who offered up another Indian like some treaty". (58) Such a worst treatment is given by one Indian to another Indian. In this story Alexie tries to search out the reason behind such behaviors. His real life experiences help him to search it out. He writes:

O my drunk and lovely father! He was one of the Indians who tossed his drunken friend onto the roller coaster in "Amusement". How could one Indian have done such a thing to another Indian? I never asked my father why he did it, but I wrote a story why I thought it happened, and even

after my father read the story, I still didn't have the courage to ask him why he did it. How lame is that? (xix)

In this story *This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona* Victor's father, Arnold is ". . . died of heart attack in his trailer and nobody found him for a week" (60) in Phoenix, Arizona. No one on the reservation has enough money to get there to retrieve the ashes and belongings of him except cigarette and fireworks salespeople. It indicates that there is stark poverty and might be class distinction on the reservation. Victor wants to go there to claim his meager inheritance. Victor just has lost his job at the BIA and Tribal Council also has a difficult time financially. About his living in poor condition Alexie says, "I knew how to live in poverty, having grown up on an American third-world reservation . . .". (xiii)

Victor had not seen his father in a few years, only talked on the telephone once or twice, ". . . but there still was a genetic pain...pain as real and immediate as a broken bone". (59) Thomas Builds-the-Fire, a childhood friend of Victor, is ready to support, lending him money but on the condition that is if Victor takes him with on the trip to Phoenix. He helps Victor to retrieve his father's ashes because he sees Arnold as hero and a father figure who had saved him from the fire that killed his parents.

One more reason for helping is when at the age of thirteen Thomas goes to the Spokane and stands by the 'Falls' waiting for a sign or a vision, which he was waiting from the childhood, Arnold appears and puts his hand on Thomas' shoulder in a concern and tells him that, "All you're going to get here is mugged!". (69) Then he takes Thomas for breakfast and then to the reservation, is a vision for Thomas. He inspires

Thomas in dreams telling “Take care of each other”. (69) Arnold asks him to take care of Victor. So “. . . [Thomas] had to watch out for [Victor] as part of the deal”. (70)

Thus Arnold cheats his son hiding vital information in his identity formation process. About the father-son relationship in this story Alexie says, that “I kept trying to figure out the main topic, the big theme, the overarching idea, the epicenter. And it is this: the sons in this book really love and hate their fathers”. (xxii)

At the beginning of their journey, their relation is uncomfortable and frequently hostile due to their opposite personalities and feelings about Arnold. One of the central reasons for conflict between Victor and Thomas, is completely opposite opinion over Arnold, is the reason behind their different perspectives on the meaning of a father and fundamental difference in their approach, attitude and understanding of life. Both have different and opposite perspectives on the meaning of a father because both were struggling to choose their parents.

Arnold is a positive figure and much better father to Thomas than to Victor. He retrieves Thomas from the city and rescues him from fire and later from orphanhood. Victor’s experiences are both good and bad. Though both Victor and Thomas grow up without parents and suffer from the feeling of loss, Victor struggles with this most. Because his knowledge is that his father has abandoned him. Thomas is too young when his parents die in fire so he willingly adopts Arnold as a father figure. Victor could not bear Thomas’ glorification of Arnold, a father who had been drinking violently and had abandoned him when he was very young.

But during the trip Victor and Thomas develop bond and understand each other better. They struggle with the choices of their parents. These two Native adolescents are determined to find their identity or greater self in the family and community. But Victor focuses selfishly only on his losses. It is more difficult for Native American youth to change society for the better as their life is limited to reservation life. Victor, one of the Native youth is unsure of his place within his community and family. In this way, Natives are attempting to find their identity within their community.

In this story, Coeur d'Alene Reservation is established as the land of narrative centre. It is a central point for both departure and return or homecoming to a strong Native community. The term reservation is as important as the term Indian to the identity of Natives. This story is identified with real experiences of Alexie, is explained by him,

What else is true? My best friend, Steve, and I traveled to Phoenix to pick up his father's ashes just like Victor and Thomas do in 'This is What It Means to Phoenix, Arizona,' though the fictional father was much more like my father than Steve's. (xx)

This story is like one of the best known boy–hero myths from Native mythologies. Victor and Thomas, of same age, grown up playing together are the central but opposite characters from the same community. They venture together for the same reason i.e. to look their unknown father. And to understand better who they are, who their father is and why he left them. In their journey like after many adventures of mythological heroes they find out their father.

During the journey Victor, a warrior learns that he and Thomas, as different as they are, have actually a lot more in common. They learn much about themselves and their own identity. And gradually begin to reconcile these differences and acquire respect, and affection. Their friendship is united, reborn and some episodes of their earlier life are recounted. It promotes Victor to remember all the good times they had together. He remembers how Thomas had helped to free him from a nasty underground wasp nest. He asks Thomas to tell him a story as a way of reminiscing. Here Alexie wants to tell that traditional Indian culture or community on the reservation can be integrated or repaired.

Thomas a crazy storyteller likes to tell stories whether anyone listens or not. He closes his eyes while telling the same stories over and over again. Thomas a man of imagination who maintains and carries heritage of traditional Indian culture is excluded on the reservation. Being a prophetic storyteller he links ancestral tradition of Indian culture to present. He suggests Victor to throw his father's ashes in the Spokane River so that his ". . . father will rise like a salmon . . . and find his way home. . . . His teeth will shine like silver, like a rainbow". (74) Finally Victor gives Thomas half of the ashes as recompense and agrees to share his father with him. This acceptance of Thomas by Victor as family is the first step to find his place in the community. He does not tell Thomas that Arnold accidentally killed his parents by starting the house fire. He wants to protect Thomas from emotional harm of losing a father figure.

The reference of salmon in the story is a metaphor for both the Spokane tribal people and the loss of their traditional way of life. It emphasizes the fact that salmon returns to the place of birth to die. Arnold's death in the Phoenix disrupts this cycle who never returns to the reservation. After his death in the Phoenix he was cremated and his ashes

were waiting for boys to retrieve. He was always trying to get home though failed in his struggle. This cycle is completed by boys returning his ashes to the reservation especially to the river.

There is an allusion of Phoenix, a metaphorical bird who rises again and again from the ashes. Victor and Thomas like two brothers of the mythic story are in search of their father; ultimately discover a star or the sun in the form of remains. In the story three things reborn like phoenix from the ashes, are relationship of Victor and Thomas, Indian tradition, and Indian spirit of Victor's father.

Before Arnold left his family for Arizona and died there Thomas a visionary storyteller was known that Victor's father was going to leave their family. He also had known that he has died and he will have to help Victor to bring his ashes back. He, ". . . heard it on the wind. [He] heard from the birds. [He] felt it in the sunlight". (61) Thomas through his frequent storytelling tries to change society. He talks to dogs and cars and listens to wind and pine trees. He, ". . . learned a thousand stories before [he] took [his] first thousand steps". (61) For Native Americans stories, folklores or traditional oral narratives are the collection of culture. They preserve and transmit passages of prayers, historical events, communal values, and cultural practices from one generation to the next. It is a living process of language which has spiritual energy. So the stories of storytellers like Thomas add to the identity formation of Indians.

Thomas, who annoys people with his incessant historical or mystical tales, is the symbol of traditional culture, once ". . . got into a fistfight. Victor was really drunk and beat Thomas up for no reason at all". (65) Victor, who is a young Indian everyman, under the influence of alcohol, a white cultural symbol, attacks Thomas, the symbol of old



Native American tradition. Alcohol nearly becomes another character throughout the story. Characters measure their lives by whether events happened before or after their first taste of alcohol. Its abuse becomes an identifying trait among American Indians. "The only real thing he shared with anybody was a bottle and broken dreams". (74)

Alexie's characters care deeply about other Indians is a crucial part of their identities. There are several incidents in this book during which they remind each other and the audience that they are Indians. "Whatever happened to tribal ties, the sense of community?". (74) Norma Many Horses stops Victor from beating Thomas. She with Victor's mother is a powerful Indian woman. In media, Indian women promoted stereotypically and presented artificially and as a commodity. In this story, images of Native women are more significant as advisors, guides etc. It may be because their identities are in doubt as they do not look, act, live or talk like stereotypical Indians.

Native American people hold nature in high respect. They believe that spiritual forces are present in it. While returning from Phoenix Thomas crushes a jackrabbit under the wheels of their pickup. It might be the only alive thing in the whole state of Nevada. Thomas thinks that it is a suicide. The barren area and death of the bird in returning journey symbolize life of Indians outside reservation. Native life being limited only to reservation becomes more difficult outside it. When any Samuel breaks this bar, he returns only in the form of ashes. It suggests that Indians are devoid of any identity and at the point of death. It also suggests that though live in difficulty they are hopeful. They set to search their identity out and succeed in it.

Sherman Alexie has used an autobiographical incident to write this funny story *The Fun House*. He writes, that “A terrified mouse did run up my aunt’s pant leg, but I wildly exaggerated the aftermath . . .”. (xx) The story gives a glimpse of Victor’s childhood life and incidents regarding his aunt Nezy, who sews beautiful buckskin outfits or traditional beaded dresses. Once she makes a too heavy full-length beaded dress for a woman, and prophesizes that who “...can carry the weight of this dress on her back, then [Indians will] have found the one who will save [them] all”. (76) It symbolizes that Native culture gives respect and believes in female leadership. It needs woman savior who can carry the responsibility of tradition, to pass it from one generation to next.

When in one of the quiet morning aunt Nezy’s son releases a tremendous fart, a startled mouse runs straight up in her pant leg. Instead of helping, her husband and son both roll with laughter on the floor, tease and make remarks that the mouse would have thought that it is “. . . the ugliest mousetrap I’ve ever seen!”. (77) In an outrage, she reminds them how she fills their stomachs every night by cooking and frying bread. She hopes some pterodactyl would grab them. She curses her son for being thirty years old and not doing any work except getting drunk. Under the cover of fun, her husband and son are trying to hide the hunger and unemployment of reservation life. They are helped by mouse to turn their distress or misery into laughter.

After the incident Nezy walks up to the bank of Tshimikain Creek, takes off her clothes and goes naked under the water. Her husband and son surrender, plead so often but in vain. She just chants “One dumb mouse tore apart the whole damn house”. (81) There she remembers her past. Her delivery was a madhouse, a funhouse. After the birth of her son she asked only one question, “Will he love to eat potatoes?”. (81) She

wanted to name her son Potatoes or maybe Albert. The doctor of the hospital tricked her for signing a document to tie her tubes. It reminds the white ways to exterminate Native population. Either they serialized Native women forcefully or tricked them to accept the surgery.

Victor, a narrator of the story goes again thirty years back when aunt Nezy was dancing with her husband at a cowboy bar, a place where all were Indians. She was a beautiful dancer and had given lessons to feed her child. At that time while driving home back, her husband was drunk heavily who slid pickup into the ditch. She crawled out of the wreck, her face full with blood while her husband lay completely still in the middle of the road. This flashback represents Indian tradition of dancing and freedom. Thirty years later they were in the same hospital and still had not paid the bill of services rendered then. Time and situation, like most of the reservation elements always remain unchanged.

There is a troubled history behind the relationship of Victor's aunt and uncle. Though she has love and dedication towards her husband and son, they antagonize and have nothing to do with her. She finally surrenders to the water, but she “. . . knew that things had to change”. (82) Though she almost falls from the heaviest weight of beaded dress, she denies their help. She gains enough strength to take one step after another. She hears drums and songs and dances because, “Dancing that way, she knew things were beginning to change”. (82)

It symbolizes that though earlier she was waiting for someone savior she turns herself into savior. Her swimming naked can be compared with rebirth. Being a woman from Native American community, she has to face double suppression, by Native male and white society. It has made her capable of carrying the weight of responsibility

towards tradition. She balances the weight of beaded dress on her while walking slowly. Her dance suggests that Native women have started taking control of their life to preserve their identity.

In the story *All I Wanted to Do Was Dance*, Victor dances in a Montana bar with the one hundredth Indian woman, in the one hundredth dancing days, since the white woman he loved has left him. It is “. . . his compensation, his confession, largest sin, and penance”. (83) He is drunk and in insomnia misses his white lover and in response shouts,

I started World War I, [and] I shot Lincoln . . . underwater drunk staring up at the faces of his past. He recognized Neil Armstrong and Christopher Columbus, his mother and father, James Dean, Sal Mineo, Natalie wood. (84)

Here Victor remembers historical characters of Native and white forefathers to convey that white tendency of dominance and subjugation of the weaker section of the community, had been continued from long past. And for Victor it is resulted into his breakup with a white girlfriend. To bear this loss of break-up Victor, an Indian forced by whites to leave city, is engrossed in the drink. It is a remedy on any Indian pain and suffering to forget the real world. It only available escape from reality is introduced by Europeans to make Indians addict permanently.

At night, Victor feels hopeless and vacuum by the memory of his white girlfriend. He continues to drink hard and thinks that if he drinks just one more beer then it will save the world. He tries to make himself happy and is hopeful about future. Here Alexie depicts causes and results of alcohol with sympathy. On the television while looking colored pictures he remembers a black and white television, in which he thinks “. . . everything was much clearer then. Color complicated even the smallest

events". (87) Here Alexie wants to tell that no one knows the race or color of a person on the screen of the black and white television. At one time all were equal as there was not discrimination between man and man based on color, race, religion, class etc.

After this incident Victor tries to live a life full with productivity, but falls back again on drinking. It is the final solution for broken relationships, because, he feels "Nothing more hopeless than a sober Indian". (87) Alcoholism, a prevalent fact has a cultural value in the lives of Indians. It is satirized and mocked by Alexie. Its consumption on the reservation results into depression is an unavoidable part of its circumstances.

Victor remembers various incidents of childhood and when he was living with his white girlfriend. In one of them his parents were fully drunk, and he was, ". . . fancydancing in the same outfit his father wore as a child. The feathers were genetic . . .". (87) It suggests that reservation life is static. Memory and drink are the only last solace to escape from the harsh reality of the present reservation life. Though they pass from one generation to the next, are always the same.

Victor drives a garbage truck for the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) and sometimes cooks hamburgers at the Tribal Café. He thinks of tossing twenty-four bottles out of the window. On payday, he makes his wallet empty drinking in Trading Bar. Alexie tells that someone says he has been there for whole life whereas another one says for four hundred years. He has returned on the reservation for one hundred years after being lost in the desert for forty years. It refers to the story of Old Testament in which Moses was forced to wander with Israelites for forty years in the desert. It also suggests that with the help of money and alcohol Native American culture has been corrupted by Europeans since

their first arrival. Initially in order to get a better profit, it was often given to Native Americans to relax them while exchanging goods with them.

Victor shares drink with one of the Cherokee strangers. He tells Victor how to make a difference between a fake Indian and a real Indian. He tells, "The real Indian got blisters on his feet. The fake Indian got blisters on his ass". (91) At the end of the story, Victor laughs and sees him dancing. It suggests that he is hopeful about his life. He starts taking control of his life, a way towards the achievement of his identity.

In the story *The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire* Alexie uses true and imagined incidents from Native American history to deal with the oppression of Natives by whites. In this absurd story Alexie uses black humor, comedy and sarcastic language. This allegorical Kafka sequel story begins with an apt epigraph from Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. It is "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning". (93)

In this story, Thomas begins to talk after the break of twenty-year silence. It gives Esther, a wife of a tribal chairman David Walks Along, courage to leave her husband. David arrests Thomas perceiving him as a threat to his leadership. He thinks that Thomas would awaken Indians to make them powerful against BIA. Twenty years ago a lifetime jail sentence had been given to Thomas for his confession of committing two murders before one hundred and fifty years ago. He had held the reservation postmaster Eve Ford at hostage. And ". . . [he] had threatened to make significant changes in the tribal vision". (93) Thomas had cleared regarding the charges and freed when he promised to keep silent. From then he was constantly telling stories internally. Now He is talking again, and sent to jail for calling the tribal police chief's wife "a savage in polyester pants".

He talks uncomfortable truths about the corrupt tribesmen and doings of the local Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Thomas's behavior is described as, "A storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth. Dangerous". (93) He speaks the 'truth' of white exploitation, discrimination, and dominance against American Indians. It brings him before a court. Here Alexie raises finger at the power of BIA, an institution to help Indians, headed by whites. Like BIA David WalksAlong, a tribal police officer or chairman wants to keep Indians on the reservation in an enslaved state.

During his trial Like Joseph K. of *The Trial*, Thomas is not informed about charges against him. While defending himself, he describes how Indian history is usurped by whites. In the court his compulsive story-telling habit earns him both, a ridiculous verdict and the audience, he had long sought. Though courtroom is in chaos Thomas continues to tell the stories of atrocities, committed against Indians. Here alternate timeline and surreal and imaginary situations are used by Alexie. Thomas confesses various historical acts of native heroism and white cruelty.

In his testimony he tells stories about the battle he was involved in. He is one of the 800 ponies stolen by white general in 1858. When cross-examined, in his first battle he is Wild Coyote. Thomas convicts two murders committed by Wild Coyote, a great Indian warrior who protested against whites at the very young age. He regrets the killing of two Steptoe's soldiers. He becomes Qualchan, an Indian executed by whites. This scene describes an American Calvary massacre of 800 horses.

Thomas is forced to face trial for the BIA. It underlines the prejudiced and partial justice system of America. Thomas's faith is sealed

in the hands of the court, is on the witness stand. He struggles to free himself from charges that the reader, the judges, and Thomas himself cannot see. But all his attempts are in vain, because at the end two 'concurrent' life terms are sentenced to him. Here Alexie suggests that it is very dangerous for Indians to surface repressed anger. In the concluding epilogue Thomas on a bus is headed to prison and he begins to tell, "this story". (103)

It suggests that Thomas' creative faculty and imagination cannot be caged by anyone. He narrates the fate of his people in the past and juxtaposes with present where still his people are oppressed. The indigenous American culture has been destroyed, and the wealth of its heritage is divorced from the remaining Indians. They are left to struggle for their identity is shown through the crime of Thomas Build-the-Fire.

The story *Distances* takes place in an apocalyptic surrealistic situation where a plague has wiped out all the white population. And the life of Indians on the reservation is separated from the white world. In this story Wavoka, the Paiute Ghost Dance Messiah, has heralds the event of the Ghost Dance to find solutions to the horrible Indian situations. It begins with the message of him:

All Indians must dance . . . in next spring Great Spirit comes. He brings back all game of every kind . . . All dead Indians come back and live again. Old blind Indian sees again and get young and have fine time . . . all the Indians go to mountains . . . Whites can't hurt Indians then . . . big flood comes like water and all white people die, get drowned. After that . . . nobody but Indians everywhere and game all kinds thick. Then medicine man tells Indians to send word to all Indians to keep up dancing and the good time will come.



Indians . . . who don't believe . . . will grow little . . . will be turned into wood and burned in fire. (104)

Ghost dance is a recurring theme in the works of Sherman Alexie. In this collection, there are numerous references of it. It suggests that when all the worldly ways of resistance finish Indians turn towards imagination, prophesy, and spiritual practices to survive and preserve their identity from final eradication. The plague remembers the role of smallpox in Native American history. The European settlers introduced it to wipe out indigenous population. They gave Indian people blankets 'infected' with smallpox. The apocalypse that targets white people in this story is a reversal of it.

In this story Native Americans manage to survive better than whites, but their condition is also difficult. They are divided into the Skins and the Urbans. Skins lived on the reservation prior to the plague, and the Urbans lived in cities. Urbans are weakened by the apocalypse, and many have horrible deformities. They are suffering from a disease of falling off skin and limbs, and are being killed by Other Indians, Native Americans who are returned home from one thousand years ago. Most of the white men are died and remaining sick will die soon. Victor, a narrator of the story explains that it has happened because Custer could have done something or “. . . maybe it was because the Ghost Dance finally worked”. (104)

The character of Custer occurs in all the writings of Alexie. In the same collection, there is reference of Custer in the story *All I Wanted to Do was Dance*. Here Custer is referred to General George Armstrong Custer, a controversial historical character who was one of the worst of white brutal individuals. He destroyed everything that Indians held

sacred. In this story Custer has caused a new apocalypse on Indians but paradoxically, it is affecting more to whites. He is responsible for an act against whites. In the history in the battle of Little Bighorn (1876) his battalion was killed by the unit of Native Americans. For victory and fame he went against the orders to capture Crazy Horse, Native warrior. It caused hundreds of deaths of his men. Custer died in the battle, is known as Custer's Last Stand.

The narrator, a 'Skin', is in love with an 'Urban' Tremble Dancer, one of the City Indians who survives and returns to the reservation after all falls apart. City Indians look like five hundred years old or lived forever. But she only has burns and scars all over her legs, which makes her shack from the pain while dancing around a fire. Victor wants to marry with her because of the differences between 'Urbans' and 'Skins'. He tells,

Urbans are the city Indians who survived and made their way out to the reservation after it all fell apart . . . most of them have died since. Now there are only a dozen Urbans left, and they're all sick. (105)

The Urban Indians diseased and contracted by illnesses die from the contamination of the white world. Though they return on the reservation, it is too late. When one of the Original Urban pregnant women arrives on the reservation and gives birth to a monster, "The Tribal Council decided it's a white man's disease in their blood". (107) The Tribal Council makes rule against the marriage of Skins with Urbans, as it does not want to happen it again. It shows that the outside environment of the reservation is still destructive to Indians. Those who go to the white world, have to carry evil and face death.

The Indians burn everything related to whites and clean white houses. They want to destroy anything that reminds the white world. The world outside the reservation is empty. The Tribal Council buries the bodies of dying tribe members on the football field. Disobeying the Tribal Council's rule of separation, the narrator meets Tremble Dancer secretly and longs for the products of the white world. The narrator finds a transistor radio in the attic and hides it secretly. It hidden and protected by narrator still works. The narrator increases the volume of the radio and hears the sound of his breathing.

There is the symbolism of television throughout the story. The author repeats, "Last night I dreamed about television. I woke up crying". (106) Narrator is dependent on white world and he does not want separation from it. So there is a sense of loss in the mind of the narrator. Earlier, he used to measure his time with the tick of the watch or sound of the radio. Now he has to measure time in his natural breaths. Though he misses the sounds of the radio, he is separated from the evil and is in a better situation. The narrator is reminded of watches because,

. . . Judas WildShoe gave a watch he found to the tribal chairman, who said, A white man artifact, a sin . . . They measured time exactly, coldly. I measure time with my breath, the sound of my hands across my own skin. I make mistakes. (109)

This story has subtle references to Christianity. The name Judas WildShoe, seems to be drawn from Judas Iscariot, a figure from the New Testament who known for betraying Jesus Christ. He plays a similar role in this story, aiding the corrupt tribal leadership in destroying a wristwatch. There is ambiguity about the 'mistake' that can be interpreted with the following important clues.

Last night I held my transistor radio . . . examined it closely, searching for some flaw. . . But there was nothing, no imperfection I could see. If there was something wrong, it was not evident by the smooth, hard plastic of the outside . . . I held that radio and turned it on, turned the volume to maximum, until all I could hear was the in and out, in again, of my breath. (109)

The television and the transistor radio, are a symbol of white culture, are rejected by Indian people. They eliminate these white culture media which no longer remains dominant. To affirm their culture and identity, Native Americans destroy the symbols of white culture. Though the radio appears flawless on the outside, it fails to work, as it has mistakes on the inside, “. . . where you couldn't see, couldn't reach”. (109) Though modern age has produced the need of white world gadgets, there is a risk of losing Indian identity. They are excluded permanently for going outside Native world. They denied opportunities of growth in the white world are forced back. The destruction of white world in this story is a positive thing for the Indian people to survive. Wavoka prophesizes that, “The others have come from a thousand years ago, their braids gray and broken with age. They have come with arrow, bow, stone ax, large hands”. (108)

Wavoka with his prophesy brings back Native Americans from thousands of years ago. One of the Others or ghosts of native forefathers takes Tremble Dancer, one of the Urbans infected with the sickness to whom Victor loves, away and brings her with a big belly. She giving birth to a growing larger salmon, “. . . died, her hands bled seawater from the palms”. (109) These god-like Others transform Tremble Dancer, one of the Urbans into a savior figure. It symbolizes the return of salmon and

the sea, important aspects of the Spokane people's lives before colonization. Here the image of Christ is substituted for Tremble Dancer and bleeding from the palms is substituted for seawater. Like Christ, she had come to save the purity of ancient human race from the contagion.

After the apocalypse, Noah Chirapkin, the only Skin ventured to travel off the reservation, finds a black flower and emptiness. Noah is murdered by the impregnator of Tremble Dancer. All the old people dying are decided evil and diseased by white man's blood by Tribal Council. Tremble Dancer's rape and death and Noah's murder by Others suggest the severe punishment for going off and then coming back to reservation.

The dangers of Euro-American world are represented in the *Distances*. It portrays the division of Native Americans between the Skins, a dominant group and the Urbans, a submitted one. It suggests that one system of domination is replaced by equally dominant one. It portrays an event where white people leave the United States to the Native Americans. It is similar to one of the stories from this collection *A Drug Called Tradition* which depicts it as a positive tragedy. The narrator of *Distances* desires for some artifacts of pre-apocalypse civilization. Alexie suggests that Indians will soon find the final solution to such type of burdened relationship with white society.

At the end Victor laughs, imagining how savage Indians would have slaughtered those helpless settlers in those days. This visionary story destroys the existing power relations between Indians and whites. It is an imaginary picture of the world where whites are exterminated from Indian lands by plague and are returned to their old traditions.